

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 29, 2003

CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit, 413-253-4371, [Diane.Petit@ma.usda.gov](mailto:Diane.Petit@ma.usda.gov)

## **USDA implements \$6.5 million in Massachusetts conservation projects in 2003**

Massachusetts landowners, working in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), implemented some \$6.5 million worth of conservation projects in 2003 that will safeguard water quality, preserve farmland, improve wildlife habitat and protect wetlands across the Bay State. NRCS programs provided cost-share assistance for the projects.

**Plymouth County** farmers – primarily cranberry growers – received the most federal cost-share assistance for conservation projects through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) at a total of more than \$744,000. EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals.

Other areas of the Commonwealth that received significant EQIP funding were **Worcester County** at \$489,000; **Franklin County** at \$454,000; and **Hampshire County** at \$327,000. Statewide, dairy and livestock producers received more than \$1 million in conservation assistance through EQIP.

**Barnstable County** received more than half of Massachusetts' funding allocation for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) at \$304,000 for projects such as coastal grassland and saltmarsh restoration. The remaining \$296,000 funded a variety of wetland, fish passage, grassland and woodland projects statewide.

-- MORE --

Some 1,600 acres of prime Massachusetts farmland will be protected from development in the coming year with more than \$2.8 million in federal funding through the federal Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP). FRPP works in conjunction with the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program by providing up to 50 percent federal funding for the state to purchase from farmers a permanent restriction on farmland entered into the program.

Cranberry growers in **Plymouth and Nantucket counties** received more than \$766,000 through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) to take cranberry bogs out of commercial production and restore them to natural wetlands.

"I'm pleased with the conservation work that we have accomplished in the commonwealth this year," said Cecil B. Currin, USDA-NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "Although limited resources may have prevented us from providing cost-share assistance to some applicants, I hope that we can do even more next year and encourage farmers to take advantage of the wealth of technical expertise available from their local NRCS office."

###